

New Year plans for a new fee deferral program and a new payment option

The Clerk's Office will begin the New Year by changing some of the financial services presently offered, which will provide more options and convenience for customers.

The first change, effective January 1, 2003, occurs in the area of Fee Deferrals. Superior Court's Presiding Judge Colin Campbell signed a new order that standardizes and improves this procedure for the customer and the Court. The law allows individuals who are financially unable to pay their court fees to request a Fee Deferral (the fee is not paid at the time of filing, but at a later date). Under the new process, the customer makes the deferral request which then is considered under the new standards.

The order establishes strict guidelines, based on the U.S. Poverty Guidelines, to help determine the need for a Fee Deferral. It also presents court officials with different options based on certain criteria to determine a payment schedule.

The new payment options, which relate to poverty guidelines, are:

- A full fee deferral is given until the case is completed; then the court determines what fees, if any, will be paid. This option is given to applicants whose income does not exceed 150% of the established poverty guidelines.
- \$10 per month is paid until the amount is paid in full. This option is given to applicants whose income is greater than 150% but less than 175% of the established poverty guidelines.
- Twenty-five percent of the fee is paid upfront, and the remaining amount is paid over the next three months. This option is given to applicants whose income is greater than 175% but less than 225% of the established poverty guidelines.
- The full amount is paid at the time of filing. This payment method occurs when the applicant's income is greater than 225% of the established poverty guidelines. In this case, the full payment is required at the time of filing and the applicant's request for a fee deferral is denied.

A review procedure by a judicial officer is established for exceptional cases.

Requests for deferrals are accepted at Window 9 in the Central Court Building in Downtown Phoenix, at the Filing Counter in the Southeast Regional Center in Mesa, at the Filing Counter in the Northwest Regional Center in Surprise, and at the Filing Counter in the Old Courthouse in Downtown Phoenix. The Clerk of the Court now accepts bank issued credit cards (Visa/Mastercard) as a form of payment for fee deferrals.

Another new service the Office will begin offering shortly is expanding the credit card payment option to customers at its Customer Service Center, located at 601 W. Jackson, Phoenix. This new service will allow customers to pay for their copies of court records, marriage licenses, and the Clerk's portion of the passport application fee with a credit card. For the past several years, the Office has only accepted a limited number of credit card transactions only relating to its phone customers.

The final phase of the credit card payment option will be rolling it out to the service counters at all Office locations, allowing customers to pay for various fees. It is projected that this phase will be implemented in 2003.

Implementing this technology is beneficial for the Office and for its customers. It is more convenient, improves efficiency, and gives customers one more method of payment.